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Legislature Scores Big for Utah Consumers

The Utah State Legislature received high marks from Utah's top consumer advocate for enacting a variety of consumer friendly pieces of legislation during the 2003 legislative session. The most significant, passed in yesterday's waning hours, adds Utah to the growing number of states that have "do-not-call" lists, making it possible for consumers to limit, and in many cases eliminate, telemarketing calls.

Other key consumer legislation includes limits placed on contracts that would automatically renew, how credit card account numbers will be printed on receipts, and requiring consumers be notified regarding information gathered through business transactions that would be sold to third parties.

"We believe that this session has been very responsive to consumer needs, said Francine Giani, Director, Utah Division of Consumer Protection. "Obviously, the passage of SB 194, which establishes a 'Do-Not-Call' List for Utah residents, is the most notable piece of new legislation from a consumer's perspective. Credit must be given to the bill's sponsor, Senator Dave Thomas and to Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff for shepherding this bill through to passage. The support it received from members of both the Senate and House, and from the telemarketing industry was tremendous."

According to Giani, the Utah Division of Consumer Protection is already at work developing the new program for introduction and implementation in early fall.

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“The Division is in contact with several states that already have successful ‘Do-Not-Call’ programs up and running,” she says. “It’s our intention to adapt what successful programs have found to work well and to utilize the expertise that other states have developed. A couple of states have already offered assistance, which will allow us to reduce our program development time and be ready to begin enrolling consumers in the program within a few months.”

Another new piece of legislation that Giani believes will be a great benefit to Utah consumers is S.B. 86, sponsored by Senator Mike Waddoups, which places restrictions on automatically renewing contracts.

“S.B. 86 is going to help many consumers,” says Giani. “There have been problems with companies that have, in the past, induced customers to sign long term contracts which at the end, if the consumer didn’t remember to cancel, would automatically renew for an additional three or five years. This bill now requires companies to notify their customers when their contract is up.”

According to Giani, other key consumer legislation includes Senator Carlene Walker’s S.B. 6, which mandates that credit card receipts only print the last few digits of a credit card. This will make it more difficult for would be identity thieves to gain valuable information from a discarded credit card slip. Additionally, H.B. 40, sponsored by Representative Douglas Aagard now requires a company to provide a consumer notice if, in the course of a transaction, the company obtains nonpublic information which it would then sell to a third party. Both of these new bills, Giani claims, rose out of growing concerns regarding the vast quantities of personal information that is now available about consumers in the marketplace.